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ABSTRACT

This paper identifies areas of weakness in existing programs of foreign language education for secondary teachers and suggests how improvements may be effected. The National Council of State Supervisors of Foreign Languages, recognizing the need for change in language teacher education programs, discusses four major areas of concern. Remarks are directed to (1) advanced courses, (2) professional education courses, (3) the foreign language methods course, and (4) the student teaching experience. An extensive bibliography lists books and articles on general teacher education and foreign language education. (RL)

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FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION IN 1971:
A POSITION PAPER

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FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION IN 1971: A POSITION PAPER

Because of the role of State consultants in foreign language education, few persons are better situated to comment on the progress of foreign language teacher education in the United States. They were there as the shortcomings of education were proclaimed to be a problem affecting national defense. They watched and worked as federal and public emphasis shifted in favor of foreign language education, just as they are now seeing it shift to another direction. Such intimate involvement in this changing scene underlines the necessity that they formulate some viable recommendations on foreign language teacher education for the years ahead.

Subsequent papers may deal with the training of college teachers, bi-lingual teachers, elementary school foreign language teachers, or with making suggestions for certification practices. The purpose of this paper is to identify areas of weakness in many existing programs of foreign language education for secondary teachers and to suggest how improvements may be effected. It is the feeling of NCSSFL that many imperfections can be eliminated without any major revamping of the system.

This does not mean that NCSSFL does not recognize the need for basic reform, for new systems -- indeed for some system -- but experience dictates that such change is evolutionary in nature and apt to be exceedingly slow. The profession cannot wait for such a vast body of established practice to change direction. Many things can be done now. It is important to identify what is working well and what is unacceptable. At the same time, more basic changes must receive support, such as the application of the systems approach to the education of foreign language teachers.

In assessing what has worked well, it seems safe to make the following generalizations: (1) The foreign language teaching major of today controls the language much better than did his counterpart of a few years ago. He understands and speaks it better because of the increased emphasis on oral skills. In many cases,

he enters college with a better high school background. There is greater likelihood that he has managed to acquire actual experience in a foreign country. (2) He may have been exposed to some related theory, such as linguistic theory and its application to teaching. (3) He may have studied and practiced methods of foreign language teaching. (4) He has had a greater chance of having a foreign language teacher for his methods course. (5) He may have had training in the use of electronic educational aids. (6) He is far more conscious of the necessity of knowing how to present aspects of the foreign culture so that some understanding and appreciation of "foreign" value systems may result. In short, the graduating major is better in many ways than he ever was; yet many young teacher graduates still do not receive such preparation as this unless they pursue it on their own initiative.

Too many areas remain in which change has been almost nonexistent. Since most programs could be improved by only minor alterations, it is difficult to explain why teacher education has remained substantially the same for such a long period.

Several major areas where change is still greatly needed are the following:

Advanced Courses

If a teaching major is to be in a college or university sequence for only the usual undergraduate years, what should then comprise the content of third and fourth-year courses? What is the most important emphasis for a prospective teacher beyond the intermediate stage? When does he study phonetics, culture and civilization, applied linguistics, or advanced grammar and syntax? Does he have opportunity for study abroad?

Most advanced offerings in foreign languages throughout the United States involve concentration in the field of literature, often at the expense of other branches of study. We sorely need answers to such questions as: How much literature? What kind? When? Every teacher needs the humanistic contributions that good literature

makes to his development; but given the short span of time and the priorities relating to the acquisition of specific skills, teacher preparation should be less one-sided and geared more to the varied needs of the student.

At the third and fourth-year levels, several options in addition to literature should be available. Such areas as linguistics, culture, and interdisciplinary courses taught in the target language would do much to attract students. Programs should also offer foreign study as a realistic option for a greater number. While additional choices admittedly present problems in program organization and course sequencing, the systems approach offers considerable help in solving them.

There is little doubt that teaching candidates need different skills from those needed by foreign language majors who do not become teachers. Writing performance objectives for different levels or preparing audio-visual materials are two such examples. Yet many programs make little distinction in study for the two groups. A more systematic matching of course offerings to prospective teacher requirements is unquestionably needed.

Professional Education Courses

Over the past few years committees on teacher education have included, along with foreign language educators, representatives from arts and sciences to study the whole program of teacher education and to make recommendations on such matters as standards for admission and retention, general and specialized preparation of teachers, and the procedures for screening applicants for professional work. In spite of some improvements, there is still great need for change. Considerable material is now available which applies recent findings of educational research to the classroom, but little of such material has found its way into professional education courses.

A few examples of such material are as follows:

- (1) Formalized training in the techniques and improvement of interpersonal

relations as applied to teacher and student (Some of this material is available in short training packages that would be helpful to beginning teachers.)

(2) Specialized training in group relationships with emphasis on classroom application

(3) Detailed knowledge of successful research innovations in education practice; e.g., the work of Hilda Taba in the social sciences, Richard Suchman in science, Ned Flanders in the area of classroom interaction, and Norris Sanders in questioning techniques (Many of these procedures are applicable to foreign language teaching, and training materials are now available commercially.)

(4) Training in the writing of performance objectives, which should result in clarifying what teachers want their students to be able to do and which in turn would facilitate accurate evaluation of results

(5) Techniques of individualizing instruction.

Much has been learned in recent years about the relative importance and effects of various practices and procedures in the classroom. Such findings should be applied more extensively in college preparatory courses. Simulated teaching often presents a fine opportunity to demonstrate research results rapidly and effectively.

The usual objection to including new or additional material in professional courses is that programs are already crowded and can stand no more expansion. Space can easily be found, however, if a serious effort is made to eliminate needless duplication. The point is that the preparation of teachers demands that the application of research material be a priority item. Teacher trainers now have access to a great quantity of such material in a form that makes it especially adaptable to the education of teachers.

The Foreign Language Methods Course

There is probably no component of the teacher education process that presents such dramatic potential for improvement as the foreign language methods course. Some

colleges still do not have such a course, and other colleges do not have courses directly applied to specific languages. It is sad that a great number of foreign language methods courses somehow never get around to the business of actually helping a teacher candidate learn how to teach a foreign language. How many methods-course teachers have identified the tasks that a language teacher must know how to perform? How many allow him the chance to practice, in "micro" form at least, these tasks?

The answers are discouraging. There are still far too many new teachers who are not familiar with the various materials they are most apt to encounter, who are unaware of professional organizations and the help they can provide, who are lacking in specialized training in the use of the language laboratory and audio-visual equipment, who simply are uninformed regarding sources of realia, and who are not equipped for the day-to-day requirements of language teaching.

It is clear that not even a "good" methods course will solve all the problems that a young teacher may meet. It is no panacea. However, if the student is prepared in the simple fundamentals, it is more likely that he can really profit from the kind of learning that comes from experience.

Frequently, the methods teacher is unprepared to teach the subject. He may be unacquainted with public school teaching and with foreign language. In spite of his interests or preparation, he may be chosen to do the job because of his position on the faculty. In many colleges, the methods assignment is considered insignificant and lacking in prestige. Too often the person in the language department who is qualified to teach the course (i.e., interested, knowledgeable, and aware of the needs of public schools) is not allowed to do so because all methods courses are considered the province of the college education department. If the college student is to receive real assistance in the specific skills involved in foreign language teaching, he must work with a teacher who can identify these skills, who is truly interested

in teaching such a course, and who is fitted by experience and background to provide him with meaningful guidance. The solution may be found in dual appointments of staff in foreign languages and education, or dual appointments between college and local school districts or State departments of education. Foreign language education centers have also proved successful.

The profession can no longer endure the general, unspecific approach to methods teaching, the classes that substitute history of methods, studies of comparative methodology, linguistics or phonetics, for the real thing. Students need specific instruction: how to present a new dialogue, how to use linguistic information to solve specific problems in pronunciation or grammar, how to teach culture, how to set up an elementary school foreign language program, how to go about selecting a new textbook, how to supplement a textbook, and how to use other areas of the curriculum such as anthropology, music, art, or poetry to enrich language learning. The methods class should be the cornerstone of teacher preparation in foreign languages.

The Student Teaching Experience

A great deal can be done to improve the student teaching experience, a very significant part of the process of becoming a teacher. Following a good methods course, student teaching is the first opportunity that the young teacher has to perform in a real classroom situation. Many plans exist that involve various modifications. Some generalizations can be made that will apply to most programs as they now exist.

Most student teaching is done over too short a period, e.g., six or nine weeks, and it is postponed too long in the prospective teacher's overall educational program. Short periods of observation and/or teaching in a real school situation soon after the student decides to make teaching his career would serve to give him

a better idea of what is actually involved. Indeed, some students may discover that they really do not wish to pursue foreign language teaching careers. Others may find that the contact they have had with the actual teaching situation will help to make their formal teacher-education programs relevant. Some colleges have experimented with allowing teacher cadets to do controlled practice in undergraduate classes.

Instead of the short six-to-nine weeks of concentrated student teaching, longer programs involving some variety of internship offer the student a better chance for real learning. It is very important that supervision be carefully planned and that it be performed by a foreign language teacher. In many programs this is not the case. In one intern program, the college supervisor of all subjects is a former physical education major. The interns teach full time under a master teacher, who also teaches full time and often does not have the same conference period as the intern. The master teacher does not have released time for supervising the intern.

In some colleges the foreign language department does not even have opportunity to evaluate the student's language skill or to offer recommendations or comments upon his potential as a teacher. This is a particularly serious problem when the student possesses only a minor in the foreign language and goes into a secondary school to teach that language with no exposure to methodology of foreign language teaching.

The selection of the master teacher is frequently haphazard and is usually decided by logistic factors having nothing to do with the needs of any particular student or group of students. Some colleges have had great success in working closely with local school districts in the identification of teachers who are specially suited for instructing cadets, and many have developed programs and guidelines for master teachers. The responsibility of secondary and elementary schools for a greater role in the process of teacher education is an area that should receive the attention of State departments of education as well as that of the

colleges. The goal should be to get away from the unplanned, unsupervised kind of student teaching in which the regular teacher one day walks out of the room, saying to the cadet, "It's all yours," and rarely comes back or offers much assistance.

Conclusion

A number of other foreign language teacher practices and procedures could be listed. Since those listed above are the most important in terms of effect, they represent the areas generally in need of greatest improvement. Perhaps the most severe indictment of the entire system is that change has occurred slowly even though few insurmountable difficulties actually exist. Minor adjustments in many cases would solve a substantial number of the problems.

Many clear and thoughtful guidelines exist which define in detail what foreign language teacher education should be, but they are rarely utilized. Professional literature is replete with information describing what constitutes good foreign language teacher education. The greatest need is to implement the good ideas that already exist.

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